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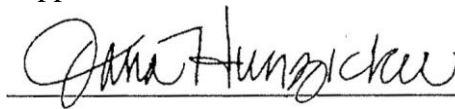
THE IMPACT MENTORING HAS ON BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS PURSUING  
POST-GRADUATE EDUCATION AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A Scholarly Research Project

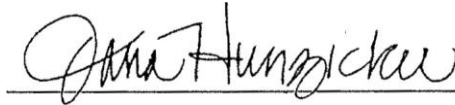
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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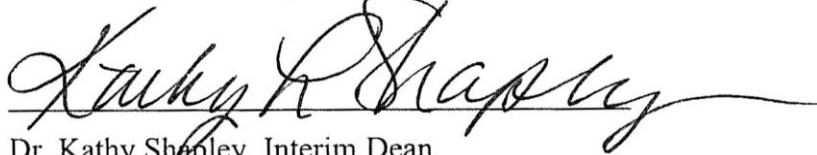
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## ABSTRACT

Through qualitative methodology, the researcher examined the challenges that Black male college students at predominantly White institutions face when seeking to locate or establish relationships with mentors at their institutions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to get first-hand knowledge of ten senior undergraduate Black males pursuing postgraduate studies at predominantly White institutions. In addition, the researcher conducted the interviews through the Zoom application. Moreover, the researcher organized and transcribed the interviews, spreadsheets, transcripts, notes, and findings for the themes through the Sonix application using coding. The purpose of this action research study was to examine the impact mentoring has on Black male college students pursuing postgraduate education at predominantly White institutions. In this study, the researcher examined how Black male college students can establish mentoring relationships at predominately White institutions. Those students cannot take advantage of the impact and influence mentors provide as they pursue postgraduate education. The findings, which are of utmost importance, suggest that mentoring played an essential role in assisting Black male college students by giving them a voice in how predominantly White institutions can help them increase academic performance, self-esteem, and social skills.

## DEDICATION

This action research is dedicated to Black males worldwide, a group that often faces unique challenges in higher education. It is also dedicated to my biggest supporters: my parents, grandparents, wife, and children. Their unwavering support has been my driving force throughout this research. I am deeply grateful to my mentors and supporters, whose guidance and encouragement have been invaluable.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Introduction**

As Horoszoeski (2020) states, students with mentors perform better overall in school, advance in their fields or careers more quickly, and experience more work-life satisfaction. Historically, mentors also benefit from having a mentee by serving as an example to the mentee and other students, being inspired daily, and ongoing learning throughout the mentoring relationship. Mainstays for mentors and mentees include communication, expectation, respect, and trust (Eller et al., 2014). Trust is crucial in mentoring because building successful relationships requires time and patience (Goodsett, 2021).

Many Black males have distinctive childhood experiences that often influence their academic and social development. To adequately address the challenges of Black males who go to college, we must first acknowledge that the difficulties they experience exist (Bell et al., 2007). Therefore, it is vital for Black males who go to college to have access to information, support, and mentors themselves. This chapter introduces this action research study by describing the study's research problem, articulating the study's research purpose and questions, and explaining the significance of the study. The chapter closes by describing the organization of this research report.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

No matter how significant higher education is in improving students' lives, low graduation rates and retention continue to be challenging for Black males (Brittian et al., 2009). Historically, colleges and universities have been routinely focused on procedures and techniques to support students and assist them in graduating. However, have those institutions specifically

focused on supporting groups such as Black males? As Egan (2019) states, “Using intentional leadership, professionals in higher education should seek to support or create thriving Black male initiative programs on their campuses to address the inequity experienced by these students” (p. 90). Such initiatives have contributed to Black undergraduate support groups, improved performance, college retention, and college experience (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2018). However, putting a bandage on the issues by creating Black male initiative programs does not solve many of the issues affecting Black males that may be keeping them from graduating from college. For example, many Black male students feel isolated because of the lack of Black professors on campus (Parker et al., 2016).

The term predominantly White institution (PWI) describes institutions of higher learning in which White individuals account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Ishiyama, 2007). Black students at predominantly White institutions struggle to locate or establish relationships with mentors. According to Smiley and Fakunle (2016), tabloids, popular press, and media outlets use phrases or words that have negative connotations to describe Black men. In addition, this reinforces the unfavorable stereotypes that some White professors and peers have of Black students (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). Furthermore, non-Black faculty must rummage through feelings, including guilt, shame, discomfort, and vulnerability (Louis et al., 2018). Moreover, representation is essential for Black students seeking support and mentorship (Simmons, 2020). There are not enough Black faculty on PWI campuses to engage in mentoring, and Black students do not have someone who understands their perspectives and can empathize with their experiences (Simmons, 2020). Institutions should be intentional about hiring non-White faculty staff and faculty members who represent the non-White student populations on their campuses (Simmons, 2020).

The higher education landscape is prepared for faculty members to become active leaders in cross-racial exchanges (Louis et al., 2018). However, many faculty members need more formal preparation for this type of interaction (Rollins et al., 2013). Unfortunately, those students cannot take advantage of the impact and influence mentors provide as they pursue post-graduate education. In addition, effective mentoring can be learned and put into practice by faculty mentors who will, in turn, enable teacher assistants/graduate assistants to be more competent in performing their duties (Corbett & Parquette, 2011).

As a Black male myself with a college degree from a PWI, it was challenging connecting with connecting with non-Black mentors. I was fortunate to have my father, with whom I spoke daily. However, I needed to establish a mentor outside of my immediate family. My mentor at my PWI worked in the academic advisory office, and he was instrumental in my decision not to transfer to another university during a rough period in college. My mentor was also instrumental in making the dean's list and helping me develop a sense of belonging at the university. Because of my mentor, I learned how to set my long and short-term goals and carry out the expectations of the first former Black college male at my university. For these reasons, I was motivated to study the mentorship experiences of Black male college students at a PWI.

### **Mentoring, Challenges, and Solutions**

Unfortunately, PWIs have an ugly past of excluding Black males rather than fully including them in their institutions (Harris & Lee, 2019). Even following the racial integration movement in the 1960s and 1970s, Harris and Lee (2019) indicated that because of the exclusion of Black males, a sense of hesitancy among Black males was created and has hindered this group from feeling accepted on college campuses. This research identifies the challenges Black male

college students confront in establishing healthy mentoring relationships and the unfortunate outcomes of when Black male students lack productive mentoring relationships.

### **What is Mentoring?**

What is mentoring? Mentoring is the process of serving as a mentor or someone who facilitates and assists another's development. In addition to listening to and supporting another person, mentoring includes modeling because the mentor must model the messages and suggestions taught to the initial teacher (Fox & Gay, 1995). Brewster and Ashley (2019) wrote, "Mentoring within higher education is a critical tool for student engagement, retention, and success" (p. 52). Many mentoring relationships provide vital professional and personal development options (Brooms, 2017), so it seems reasonable to expect that the college experiences for Black students would be much more positive if they were afforded this opportunity to connect with a mentor truly.

Ideally, a mentor is a loyal, committed, and dedicated guide who supports various aspects of a mentee's academic or professional growth (Barker & Avery, 2012). Equally important, a mentor exemplifies what a mentee aspires to be (Horoszowski, 2020). A mentor can be seen as essential for college students to meet their goals and develop their character while completing their undergraduate coursework and engaging in college experiences. Therefore, selecting the right mentors for Black male college students is imperative. Hence, they can align themselves with the right person to assist in executing their goals, aspirations, and long-term careers (Burger et al., 2010). For Black male college students, establishing healthy mentoring relationships creates a bond of trust between the student and mentor.

### **Challenges**

“A lack of Black professors has been tied to campus climate issues and feelings of isolation for Black male students” (Parker et al., 2016, as cited in Egan, 2016, p. 89). In another study, interviewees reported experiencing some pressure to have an increased service load through an expectation of mentoring more minority students and serving on multiple diversity-related committees, which were compensated or rewarded in the tenure process (Zambrana et al., 2017). Black male undergraduates must combat the underrepresentation logically and emotionally. Moreover, the poor representation of Black professors is leading their classrooms (Egan, 2019). One possible factor for this underrepresentation is the biases experienced by faculty on some campuses. Mistrust and cultural misunderstanding in mentor-mentee relationships can lead to vulnerability or hesitation to open up if the mentor does not have firsthand experience with the everyday challenges of Black males (Lisburg & Woods, 2018).

### **Solutions**

Like many relationships, successful mentorship is based on appreciation and faith (Lisburg & Woods, 2018). At their best, mentoring relationships create opportunities for success and bridge the gap between mentees and their goals (Burlison et al., 2020). Moreover, mentoring can be vital for Black male college students’ growth and persistence, especially at PWIs (Freeman, 1999).

When effective mentoring is prioritized and executed, Black male college students can focus on class performance, primary selection, and degree persistence. One study found that Black male students benefit from mentoring when grade point average (GPA) and credit attainment are emphasized (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). Moreover, research shows that certain types of academic mentoring are associated with greater student satisfaction and retention



(Ishiyama, 2007; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009). Specifically, Ishiyama (2007) found that Black male students reported a higher degree of satisfaction with research-focused faculty support than with other types of mentoring. Brooms (2018) agrees that structure and academically focused mentoring may be essential for Black male students rather than focusing on socialization and interpersonal bonding (Brooms, 2018).

### **Research Purpose and Question**

This action research study examined the impact mentoring has on Black male college students at a predominantly White institution (PWI). The research question of interest in this study was: How can Black male college students establish mentoring relationships at predominantly White institutions?

### **Significance of the Study**

The impact of Black male college students' exposure to mentors who look like them is remarkably optimistic, from improving test scores to increasing graduation rates (Harris & Lee, 2019). Still, Black mentors remain underrepresented at PWIs (Feist-Price, 2001), primarily due to a meager amount of Black college students choosing to major in education, lower college completion rates, and lower hiring and retention rates than their White counterparts (Gibson, 2014). This study will be of interest to higher education institutions by informing them about how establishing mentoring programs, specifically for Black males, can positively impact student support and success relationships. In addition, this study will interest Black faculty and staff by providing insight into training mentors on how to effectively communicate with Black male college students, improve retention, and establish a sense of belonging. Moreover, this study will benefit Black male college students by giving them a voice in how PWIs can help them increase academic performance, self-esteem, and social skills.

### **Organization of the Research Report**

This chapter introduced the study, described the study's research problem, articulated the study's research purpose and questions, and explained the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 will explore the literature that led the researcher to conduct this research project.

Chapter 3 will outline the research methodology and methods used to conduct the study. In

chapter 4, the findings will be reported and connections will be made to the existing literature for the purpose of answering the study's research question. Finally, chapter 5 will discuss implications for practice, offer recommendations for future research, and identify the study's limitations.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this action research study was to examine the impact mentoring has on Black males pursuing postgraduate degrees at predominantly White institutions. The research question of interest in this study was: How can Black male college students establish mentoring relationships at predominantly White institutions?

Research has shown that mentoring increases Black male college students' academic achievement, enrollment, and retention (Wilson & Allen, 2011). Despite their many challenges, mentoring relationships provide critical personal and professional development opportunities, essential for Black males who often lack access and support to informal networks and information required to succeed in academic and professional environments (Estrada et al., 2018). Unfortunately, Black male college students confront many challenges in establishing healthy mentoring relationships and often experience unfortunate outcomes when they lack productive mentoring relationships. Especially at predominantly White institutions (PWI), Black male college students are more likely to feel intimidated by faculty and less likely to have personal interactions with faculty than their non-Black peers. However, their participation in pre-professional clubs and research programs can help (Hurtado et al., 2011).

This chapter reviews the literature on various factors that can contribute to the effects of mentorship on Black males during their undergraduate college experience. After elaborating on the problem, which includes not enough Black faculty, the decrease of Black males pursuing college degrees, and lack of engagement from White faculty, the chapter will examine how mentoring influences Black males, including the history of Black males in higher education,

challenges Black males face in higher education, benefits of mentoring, and the literature surrounding different types of mentoring, such as natural, peer, cross-cultural, and same-race mentoring. Finally, the chapter will present the conceptual framework that guided the study.

### **Research Problem**

According to Gibson (2014), while there are many benefits to offering mentoring programs to students, there are also hindrances. For instance, Black male student-faculty relationships are often not strong (Harper, 2013). Therefore, it is harder to measure the effectiveness of mentoring programs if faculty-mentee relationships are weak (Gibson, 2014). Other hindrances include not enough Black faculty, lack of Black male initiative programs, the decrease of Black males pursuing college degrees, lack of engagement from White faculty, and the fear of asking for help.

### **Not Enough Black Faculty**

The number of minority faculty in American colleges and universities is commonly low (Gibson, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (USDE, 2011), in the fall of 2009, approximately 7% of college and university faculty were Black, and 79% were White. Due to the limited number of minority male faculty in colleges and universities, recruiting faculty to mentor Black male students is often challenging.

In a study of challenges associated with being a Black faculty member at a PWI, Constatine et al. (2008) supported Feist-Price's (2001) conclusions that PWIs expect more service from Black faculty than from White faculty, which may detract from the scholarly activities of Black faculty (Dahlvig, 2010). Black faculty may feel obligated to sacrifice the time they have set aside for publication and scholarship to interact with Black students (Feist-Price, 2001).

**Decrease of Black Males Pursuing College Degrees**

Holland (1993) states that the underrepresentation of certain groups in higher education has continued to generate concern. Full participation of minority groups in clubs, organizations, and honor societies remains a problematic issue; Black participation rates are particularly alarming (Siaji, 2020). Studies have shown that colleges and universities have lost ground in the college enrollment of Black students (American Council on Education [ACE], 1987; Chandler, 1988) and in the proportion of Black students granted graduate and doctoral degrees (Williams, 1989). Additionally, many Black individuals are in research and faculty positions in American universities (American Council on Education [ACE], 1987; Brown, 1988; Frierson, 1990).

Furthermore, Holland (1993) postulated that the gradual decline in Black individuals involved in administrative, faculty, and research positions was linked to Black students' participation and graduation rates in doctoral programs. In the past, many scholars suggested that the pipeline from which Black faculty members were produced was drying up (Siaji, 2020). Common explanations for the significant decline of minorities were, first, that minorities come from low-income families and do not want to take on the extra financial burden of graduate study; second, that they were most often attracted to professional schools instead of college; and third, in general, higher education has been perceived as unwelcoming toward Black students (Holland, 1993).

Scott (2016) suggested that the experience of Black males in upper-level administrative positions at PWIs has often been ignored in the literature, which is directly linked to the lack of attention PWIs have given to increasing the number of Black male administrators, particularly in comparison with the effort expended to increase the number of Black male students and faculty

(Siaji, 2020). When Black male college students do not see men like themselves in faculty and administrative positions, they are less likely to enroll in college and less likely to stay in college.

### **Lack of Engagement from White Faculty**

Adding to the problem, the number of Black males in colleges outweighs the number of minority faculty employed at American colleges and universities (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997). Black males often feel that it is challenging to connect with the White faculty at their institutions. Likewise, Black students often feel disconnected from White faculty members (Harris & Lee, 2019). In addition, Black students describe their interactions with White faculty as having to prove themselves continuously, protect or defend their intellectual interests, and vie for opportunities to serve as graduate assistants (GA) or publish with advisors (Franco, 2012). These are just a few challenges Black males face due to a lack of engagement from White faculty. Since students experience graduate school differently based on their race (Gopaul, 2015; Howard-Hamilton et al., 2009), it is not surprising that racism has been viewed as a defining feature of educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), frequently resulting in marginalization and negative educational experiences, especially for Black males.

### **History of Black Males in Higher Education**

Historically, some majority groups have maintained the racist belief that White people are more intelligent than Black people (Sutton, 2006). In addition, devious messages that certain guys do not exist here can permeate the campus culture, causing distress for Black male students (Dahlvig, 2010). Furthermore, faculty members can even view the presence of Black male students involved in some form of remediation and standards decreased (Spence & Usher, 2007). Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2002) state that the historically racist culture of the United States

provides a challenge for White faculty and staff wishing to mentor ethnic minority students on a predominantly White campus.

Specifically, because of the historical relationship between most majority and minority individuals, Black students are more inclined to ask, why would you want to help me when in the past you have been hurting me (Brinson & Kottler, 1993)? This historical relationship serves as a barrier both must overcome to achieve the degrees of intimacy and trust necessary in a productive mentoring relationship. Although developing this trust may be difficult, it is certainly not impossible when both mentor and mentee openly acknowledge that different cultural perspectives can hinder and enrich the mentoring process (Brinson & Kottler, 1993).

### **Challenges Black Males Face in Higher Education**

Graham and McClain (2019) state that there are glaring differences in educational achievements between White and Black students. Disparities in academic achievement can be seen in standardized test scores, college admission and graduation rates, and student's GPA (National Research Council [NRC], 2005). Furthermore, researchers have thoroughly documented that the racial-ethnic achievement gap extends to postsecondary education (Bensimon, 2004; Canning et al., 2016). For example, Graham and McClain (2019) explain that Black college students are particularly likely to underperform regarding GPA compared to their White student counterparts, especially at PWIs (Castro & Rice, 2003; Vars & Bowen, 1998).

Moreover, evidence accentuates how Black students are significantly less likely to obtain bachelor's degrees (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). According to Graham and McClain (2019), in 2006, only 40% of Black students enrolled in college obtained a bachelor's degree within a six-year time frame, compared with 62% of White students (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2014). In addition, the USDE (2012) indicated that in 2012,

Black students received approximately 10% of degrees conferred despite making up approximately 15% of the traditional college-student-aged American population (Graham & McClain, 2019).

Black students seek Black faculty mentors because they feel comfortable approaching them and being vulnerable to their feedback. Students often believe faculty with a similar background "hold similar views of the campus environment" (Feist-Price, 2001, p. 50).

Unfortunately, the few Black faculty employed at PWIs are outnumbered by Black students desiring a close mentoring relationship. Feist-Price (2001) shared a Black mentor's perspective at a PWI that the personal and professional pressure to reach out to Black students often outweighs the energy and time needed to sustain mentoring relationships. In other words, even when Black faculty want to mentor Black college students, they do not always have the time and energy to do so. Although mentoring programs benefit students and institutions, there is a perception that mentoring programs are expensive, time-consuming, and typically benefit a small percentage of students (Gibson, 2014; Jaswal & Jaswal, 2008).

### **Benefits of Mentoring**

A successful mentoring program requires more than matching a student with a mentor. It requires well-trained and professional staff to develop the program, provide quality mentor training, and conduct mentoring recruitment campaigns. According to a report published by the National Mentoring Partnership (NMP, 2010), the average cost for a mentoring program is \$1,500 per student. Even though mentoring programs can be expensive and time-consuming, they can be successfully implemented when colleges and universities are willing to get creative. Seeking external partnerships is one way to offer a mentoring program at a lower expense (Gibson, 2014).



Black male students who participate in a mentoring program will benefit from a structured program that provides support, guidance, and academic assistance, enabling them to succeed academically. In addition to the increase in retention and graduation rates, Black male students' level of self-esteem may increase due to mentoring programs (Whitfield & Edwards, 2011). Mentors can positively influence their mentees' behavior and emotions regarding dealing with difficult situations (Gibson, 2010), help mentees manage their thoughts and beliefs about success and overcoming obstacles (Whitfield & Edwards, 2011), and help mentees have a more positive attitude toward school and getting good grades, which can lead to higher self-confidence and expressing their feelings positively (Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999; Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005). All of these things work together to improve self-esteem.

Mentoring programs can also increase the likelihood that Black male students will graduate and continue to the next level of higher education. For example, a study at Compton Community College (CCC) in California revealed that students in a cross-institutional mentoring program successfully transferred to a four-year university by fostering relationships with mentors from California State University Northridge (CSUN) (Hoffman & Wallach, 2005). In addition, students in the CCC mentoring program showed higher self-esteem, significant increases in internal locus of control, and higher academic performance and motivation (Hoffman & Wallach, 2005).

The impact of mentoring can be significant, especially for Black male college students. When Black male college students participate in mentoring relationships, their relationships with faculty and other students will likely improve, and their GPA will likely increase (Stromei, 2000). In addition, Black male students are more likely to develop social skills, seek leadership opportunities, and become more civic-minded (Opp, 2002). As a result of mentoring

relationships, college enrollment, retention, and graduation among Black male students is likely to increase as they feel a sense of inclusion and value. Also, awareness of cultural sensitivity would likely improve, and over time, the number of Black faculty and staff employed at colleges and universities would likely increase as well (Gibson, 2014).

### **Different Types of Mentoring**

Mentoring relationships give Black male college students a renewed sense of value that positively impacts their actions and decisions. When Black faculty mentor Black students, positive racial identity is strongly associated with more academic motivation, especially for Black males. Four types of mentoring include natural, peer, cross-cultural, and same-race mentoring.

#### **Natural Mentoring**

Natural mentoring forms organically between youth and older individuals within their existing communities. Natural mentors are non-parental adults who listen, advise, and advocate for individuals. Hurd and Raposa (2018) describe natural mentoring as a relationship with caring, non-parental adults who critically support underrepresented students. When Hurd and Raposa (2018) conducted a research study examining the nature of underrepresented students' relationships with natural mentors during their first three semesters in college, they concluded that participants perceived greater relational closeness with natural mentors. Raposa and Hurd (2018) discovered that natural mentors who were extended family or family friends provided more significant levels of emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental support to students than natural mentors who were former teachers or other school staff. Moreover, natural mentors who were college faculty or staff provided more informational support than natural

mentors who were family or friends (Raposa & Hurd, 2018). This study suggests that natural mentors of any kind are likely to be beneficial.

### **Peer Mentoring**

While mentoring is a "developmental partnership through which one person (a mentor) shares knowledge, skills, helpful information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else (a mentee)" (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASLHA], 2007, p. 1), peer mentoring helps students deal with the demands of the academic environment (Quinn et al., 2002). Graham and McClain (2019) explain that peer mentoring is a particular form of mentoring that is becoming increasingly popular. Existing literature suggests that peer mentoring is related to increases in Black students' overall college satisfaction, retention, and persistence (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Hill & Reddy, 2007). For example, Campbell and Campbell (2007) explored the effects of peer mentoring on academic outcomes with undergraduate students. They concluded that students with peer mentors earned higher grades and completed more courses than those without. Similarly, Snowden and Hardy (2012) conducted research suggesting that students who received peer mentoring earned a total grade point higher than those who did not. Such findings suggest that peer mentoring is a viable strategy PWIs can use to bolster academic outcomes for Black students.

### **Cross-Cultural Mentoring**

Cross-cultural mentoring involves current and shared enriching relationships with someone of a different gender, race, or religion (Barker, 2007). According to Dahlvig (2010), some scholars have evaluated mentoring methods, believing that the goal has been to form the mentee into the mentor's image. Mentors need to understand how a person's culture impacts the

formation of the mentoring process (Harris, 1999; Dahlvig, 2010). Harris (1999) suggests structures and training for mentoring so that mentees have the same access to possible mentors and engage in cross-cultural training to reduce the negative consequences of a possible bias. Furthermore, White mentors have a burden to overcome stereotypes or other negative images of racism (Dahlvig, 2010).

Mentoring relationships have similar elements regardless of the culture or race of the participants (Brinson & Kottler, 1993). For example, one study established that the mentoring experiences of Black students found no significant differences in the perceived career benefit from a relationship with a Black or White mentor (Brinson & Kottler, 1993; Alleman, 1986). According to Brinson and Kottler (1993), although the race of the mentor did not seem influential, entry-level professionals needed someone to oversee their career development.

Despite the many similarities among mentoring relationships, several socio-cultural factors make cross-cultural relationships challenging (Pederson, 1988; Ponterotto, 1991). For example, Brinson and Kottler (1993) stated that one common concern reported by some minority professors regarding their relationships with White mentors is the issue of trust because they have been conditioned to view many White individuals with a degree of caution. Challenges such as this suggest that same-race mentoring may be the best option for some mentoring relationships, especially for Black male college students.

### **Same Race Mentoring**

Same-race mentoring programs pair mentors with mentees of the same race and often of the same gender (Blake-Beard et al., 2011). For example, Black male mentoring programs are led by Black male faculty and staff and are designed to be dedicated to the success of Black male students. Black male mentoring programs can help to address the inequity experienced by these

students by contributing to Black male college students' academic performance, retention, college engagement, and support networks (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms et al., 2015; Egan, 2019).

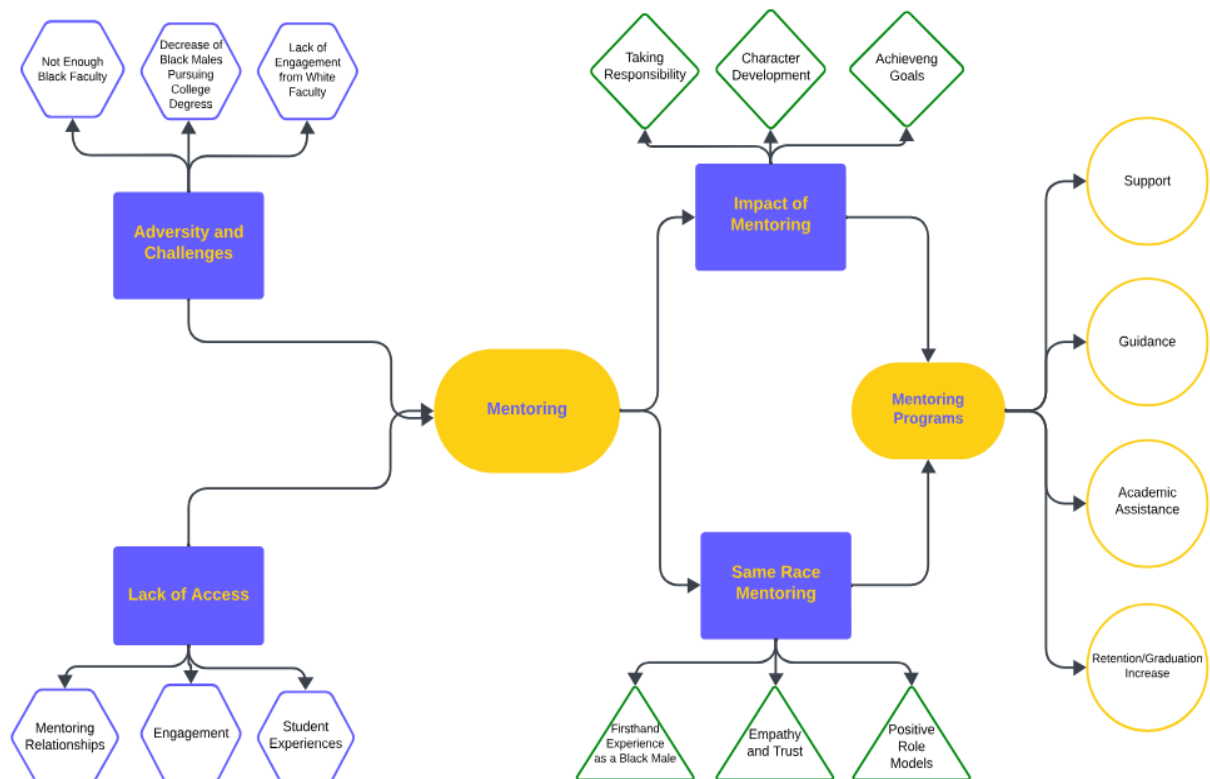
Brooms et al. (2015) conducted a study with 16 Black male undergraduates who participated in a Black Men Achieve program that revealed a theme of self-empowerment. As a result of participating in this same-race mentoring program, the Black male students believed in their academic success. They created a bond that challenged negative stereotypes of Black students (Egan, 2019). In addition, the participants could meaningfully identify with peers and faculty in a way that allowed them to learn from other Black people (Egan, 2019). Finally, participants discovered that role models and professional development are essential within the inspired learning environment championed by the program (Brooms et al., 2015).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Can mentoring make a difference for Black male college students pursuing a college degree? Most Black men deal with adversity and challenges as they grow up. The lack of access to mentors, resources, and support that could aid their development becomes a setback or a deterrent for many. In order to adequately address these challenges, mentors must first acknowledge that they exist. Mentoring relationships can be susceptible to cultural misunderstandings and mistrust if a mentor does not have firsthand experience as a Black male (Sanchez & Colón, 2005). Like all relationships, successful mentorship is based on empathy and trust (Sanchez & Colón, 2005). Mentoring relationships focus on connecting mentees and their goals with opportunities to succeed (Franco, 2012). For Black male college students, mentoring can be vital to their persistence to degree completion, especially at PWIs (Freeman, 1999). Therefore, connecting with students places significant responsibility on mentors, particularly

Black male mentors (Kincey, 2007). However, the responsibility does not belong to Black male faculty alone. Black male college students themselves must be open to engaging in a mentoring relationship and willing to do the hard work of pursuing a college degree (Miller, 2021). Pulling all of these ideas together, Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework that guided this study:

**Figure 1**



A mentor is a trusted counselor or guide who supports various aspects of a mentee's development. Most importantly, a mentor emulates and personifies all that Black male college students aspire to be. For many, a mentor is integral to reaching their goals and developing their character. Therefore, choosing the right mentor for Black males is critical.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on various factors that can contribute to the impact of mentorship on Black males during their undergraduate college experience. After elaborating on

the problem, which includes not enough Black faculty, the decrease of Black males pursuing college degrees, and lack of engagement from White faculty, the chapter examined the impact of mentoring, including the history of Black males in higher education, challenges Black males face in higher education, benefits of mentoring, and the literature surrounding different types of mentoring, such as natural, peer, cross-cultural, and same-race mentoring. Finally, the chapter presented the conceptual framework that guided the study. Chapter 3 will describe the study's research methodology, research context, and research methods.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This action research study examined the impact mentoring has on Black male college students pursuing post-graduate education at predominantly White institutions (PWI).

The research question of interest in this study was: How can Black male college students establish mentoring relationships at predominately White institutions? This chapter describes the study's research methodology, research context, and research methods.

#### **Research Methodology**

##### **Qualitative**

For this study, a qualitative approach was used to assess the mentoring experiences of Black males. Akhtar (2016) describes research design as the structure holding the study together and the various components of the investigation. Qualitative research is defined as an iterative process in which the scientific community gains an enhanced understanding by making new significant distinctions resulting from a closer examination of the phenomenon studied (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In qualitative research, "research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 24). In this study, although I am a Black male who was once an undergraduate college student, the qualitative research approach allowed me to listen to what the study's participants said and consider it through their experiences. Busetto et al. (2020) argue that qualitative research design is instrumental in helping individuals understand how and why something happens, which I believe was accomplished through this study.

##### ***Grounded Theory***



This study's utilization of qualitative research design adopted a grounded theory method for the theoretical framework. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "Grounded theory is a design of inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general abstract of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants" (p. 13). Specifically, utilizing a grounded theory method provided an opportunity to outline an action, process, or interaction established through the participants' views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hood, 2007), which in this study was how mentorship benefits or impacts Black male students at PWIs.

The selection of qualitative research design was beneficial in this study as it was aligned with the intentions and objectives of this action research project. Qualitative research allowed the study's sole researcher to gather information about the participants' experiences, reflections, attitudes, and behaviors to answer the study's research question (Rahman, 2016). Using qualitative research design is also beneficial in helping the researcher and the participants engage in an extensive discussion, allowing the researcher to administer follow-up questions (Rahman, 2016). Specifically, using qualitative research helped me assess and understand the impacts of mentorship programs for Black male students pursuing post-graduate studies at PWIs.

### **Action Research**

This study is classified as action research because the research problem is of personal interest to me. After all, I am the primary researcher (Huang, 2010). In addition, I intend to take action based on the study's findings, and I anticipate that the readers of this report will, too. "Action research is an orientation to knowledge creation that arises in a practice context and requires researchers to work with practitioners" (Huang, 2010, p. 93). In the context of this

study, an action research approach provided descriptions of trends, attitudes, or opinions of Black college males by studying their tendencies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Research Context**

#### **Research Setting**

Panther State University is the largest institution in Georgia, located in downtown Atlanta. It is a public and predominantly White institution. Once known as a commuter school, PSU now offers a vibrant student experience. Moreover, PSU is one of the nation's leading urban research universities and the only one in Georgia. According to the PSU's Africana Studies department, in 2022, the total undergraduate enrollment was 28,927, and the total graduate student enrollment was 7,085. In addition, only 10% of PSU's faculty and staff are Black, and 6% are male. Moreover, 42% of the student body is Black, the male student population is 13.5%, and the Black male population is 10%.

#### **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

Advertising and word of mouth were used to recruit prospective participants for this research. The participants were recruited through emails, flyers, and the Africana Studies department at PSU. Moreover, the administration staff in the Africana Studies department used their network to identify research participants. Although it became challenging to identify participants, make contact, maintain contact, and confirm a commitment from some students, ten students were identified as participants. Before the interviews, each participant had to sign a CUHSR consent form to participate in the research.

#### **Participants**

The participant criteria used for the research study were undergraduate senior Black males who attended PSU. To be eligible to participate in the study, the participants had to be

enrolled at PSU, be a Black male aged 20 to 25, and be a senior undergraduate student. Personal identifiers from the participants were removed from the research. Approximately ten senior Black males were selected to be interviewed for the research.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

Researcher positionality can be regarded within the multi-faceted, complex, and needed structures surrounding research inquiry before it can or should be assessed and engaged (Bourke, 2014; Throne, 2012; Throne & Bourke et al., 2018). In this study, the researcher, as an outsider, did not know the participants, PSU, faculty, staff, or the research to make conclusions. Subsequently, the researcher had zero knowledge of this research at PSU and relied on data and participants' interview responses to answer the study's question and objective.

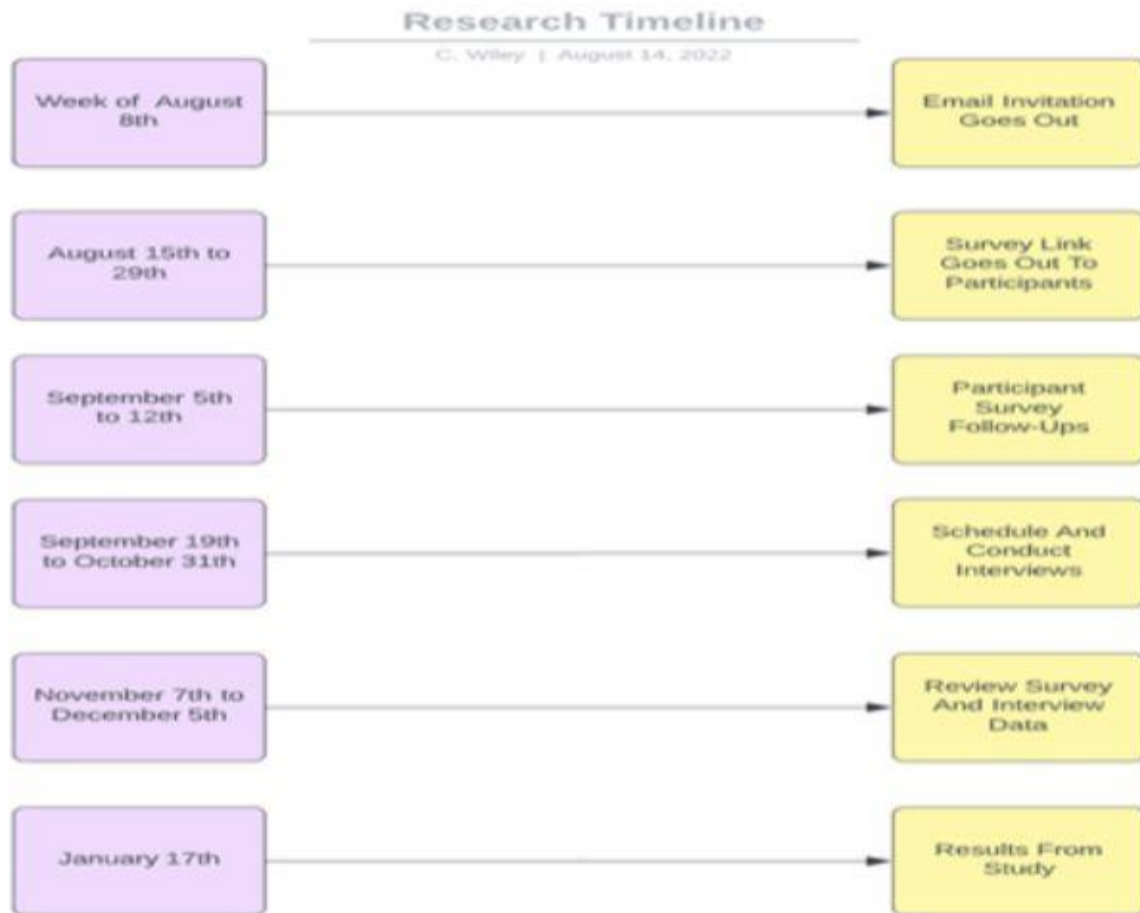
## **Research Methods**

### **Data Collection**

During the first week of the research, email invitations went out to Panther State University's Africana Studies department, inviting specific students to participate in an action research study. Second, a survey link went out to the potential participants, explaining and confirming their consent to participate in the action research. Third, additional emails were sent to follow up with the students to confirm participation in the research. Fourth, once the consent forms were completed by the participants, interviews were scheduled and conducted on those confirmed dates. Next, the data was reviewed, coded, analyzed, and transcribed once the participants completed their interviews. Finally, the data results from the research were completed, see Figure 2.

### **Figure 2**

*Research Timeline*



According to Adams (2015), semi-structured interviewing is essential for collecting data in qualitative research. The semi-structured interviews with the participants were scheduled for 30 minutes. However, they lasted an average of 18.4 minutes. In addition, the semi-structured interview questions were formed to compare and contrast information and obtain specific answers from participants (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Moreover, the interviews were conducted one-on-one on the Zoom application. The participants were asked open-ended questions to gain an in-depth perspective on the research. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions and explore participant responses further to collect data (Kallio et al., 2016).

The data was kept confidential through Google Docs, and the researcher was the only person with access to the files. In addition, the participants' names were not used; only "BAM" (Black And Male) and a number next to it was used for coding. Moreover, Google Docs encodes the content as an extra layer of protection. According to D'Angelo et al. (2010), encryption is encoding information to protect the data.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis mainly requires organizing events, individuals, and things and the properties that characterize them (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The researcher kept the data confidential through Google Docs, where the researcher was the only person with access to the files. In addition, the researcher did not use the participants' names; only "BAM" and a number were next to them. However, when using Google Docs, Google encrypts the content in transit and at rest, but with client-side encryption, the domain has chosen to add an extra layer of protection. Encryption is described as the procedure of encoding information to protect the data (D'Angelo et al., 2010).

Interviews were reviewed, coded, and transcribed on the Sonix application. In addition, the information from interviews, spreadsheets, transcripts, notes, and findings was organized in descriptive and in vivo coding for quick access. Moreover, the participants' responses were organized in columns to arrange the descriptive coding. The data trend was recognized through the participants' responses, and the reviewed analysis identified the participants' intentions, focus, and communication trends.

Next, a narrative summary was created for each research participant, and a color-coded table was created to visually summarize similarities and differences across the ten participants

related to the study's research question. Finally, the similarities and differences were categorized to develop themes or recommendations that directly answered the study's research questions.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the study's research methodology, research context, and research methods. In Chapter 4, the study's findings will be reported, and connections will be made to the existing literature for the purpose of answering the study's research question.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

This study aimed to examine the impact mentoring has on undergraduate Black male college students pursuing post-graduate education at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The study was guided by one research question: How can Black male college students establish mentoring relationships at predominately White institutions? This chapter reports and discusses the findings from data collected from semi-structured interviews of ten anonymous undergraduate senior Black male students at one PWI, referred to as Panther State University, or PSU. The chapter closes with answers to the study's research question.

#### **Findings**

##### **Participant 1**

Participant 1 was a 22-year-old former student-athlete, a transfer senior student who had moved back home to complete his baccalaureate. Participant 1 was frustrated with PSU. He stressed that Black male mentors and leaders are needed at PSU. Participant 1 believed that although fewer students at PSU have mentors, working with Black faculty members would make more of an impact than working with non-Black faculty members. He stated he felt more comfortable working with Black male faculty members because he could identify with them due to being of the same race and gender. According to Participant 1, "Panther State does a poor job hiring Black faculty." Participant 1 believed that PSU was not doing everything possible to support Black males as it pertains to mental health and outreach resources. He mentioned, "Black students are last on the list at PSU to receive help from anyone." In addition, Participant 1 felt that Black student inclusion programs and support from PSU's administration were missing. Participant 1 felt

that if PSU provided more counseling or mentoring specifically for Black males, it would positively impact the Black male student body. He stated that “when it comes to mental health and supporting Black males, the budget always gets cut.”

### **Participant 2**

Participant 2 was a 21-year-old senior, a first-generation college student who overcame many obstacles to attend college. Participant 2 remembered that “the opportunity for college was a fantasy” because he thought he would never get a chance to make it to college. Participant 2 did not care who supported him as long as he received support. Participant 2 expressed, “I am open to working with or being mentored by anyone, but I prefer a female because I feel more comfortable working with females.” According to Participant 2, “Most of my male mentors were coaches, and they communicated with everyone like their players.” Working with females reminded him of his mother and older sister, both attentive listeners. Therefore, a Black female mentor was Participant 2’s number one choice for a mentor.

Participant 2 also stated, “PSU has programs in place for Black male students, such as a university-wide student development initiative with many campus programs focused on increasing matriculation, retention, and graduation rates of underrepresented students, particularly men of color.” He also stated, “Black males are no longer neglected because the university’s president is Black.” He argued that more counselors and mentors would help Black males at PSU. However, his peers would not utilize the resources “because they were lazy and anxious.” Participant 2 concluded, “My people complain, but they are too scared to ask for help.”

### **Participant 3**



Participant 3 was a 21-year-old senior and a commuter student actively participating in student government. He stated that “the poor retention of Black male faculty at PSU is shameful.” Participant 3 explained that “PSU is not putting forth a great effort to recruit and retain Black male faculty members.” Participant 3 believed that there is a lack of an inclusive campus environment for Black males. He complained, “I was disappointed in PSU's efforts to support Black males on campus with resources and access to information.” Participant 3 agreed that “more mentors for Black males on campus would produce more classroom success.” Participant 3’s spirit and beliefs about male mentors were unyielding when asked if he preferred a Black male or female mentor. He believed Black males need Black male mentors because they positively impact personalities and actions.

Participant 3 pointed out a lack of effort to hire Black faculty and support Black males. He explained, “If PSU hired more Black staff members, the Black student's success in education would increase because Black students would receive support from Black faculty.” He stated that “many students benefit from exposure to diverse perspectives in the classroom.” Participant 3 preferred a Black male mentor over a female mentor. He expressed, “Male mentors can relate to men better than female mentors, and guys will have a positive role model to look up to and emulate.”

Participant 3 commented, “Black males are not being supported at PSU.” He stated, “PSU supports other communities more than the Black male community.” He explained, “PSU displays signage and quotes around campus to support the Pride community students.” Participant 3 recalled, “The social clubs and activity centers have been created for the Jewish and Catholic religious student groups, but nothing for the Black student groups.”

#### **Participant 4**

Participant 4 was a reserved 22-year-old senior who stayed in an apartment near campus and was actively involved with student activities. He stated that he felt apprehensive about participating in the study because of his strong opinions on PSU. Participant 4 confided, “PSU ignores Black students, pays more attention to other communities on campus, and neglects Black students.” He stated, “When the Black students protested about injustices on campus, they were not supported by PSU, compared to the Pride community students being supported consistently.” Participant 4 acknowledged PSU's efforts to create initiatives but resented that the Black community's needs on campus were always lumped under the title “multicultural.” He explained, “I was equally disappointed that PSU has a low amount of Black faculty and that the first Black male president has not done more for Black males on campus.” Participant 4 stated, “I was not interested in participating in other communities' events, only Black Student's Affairs and commencement.”

Participant 4 stated, “PSU has a poor representation of Black faculty on campus, and PSU's president pays minimal attention to Black males.” He complained, “During Black History Month, there was little to no collaborative calendar of events intended to celebrate, engage, or raise awareness of the accomplishments of Black people.” He explained, “Black History Month at PSU felt like a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. instead.” Participant 4 remembered, “During National Hispanic Heritage Month, PSU's president participated and created more activities recognizing the contributions and influence of Hispanic Americans.” According to Participant 4, “Black males need Black mentors.” He stated, “Black mentors provide access to opportunities that may have been inaccessible.”

Participant 4 continued, “Instead of the minority communities receiving individual attention, they were lumped into one big group.” He asked, “Why can't Black students have a

separate group similar to the other student communities on campus?" He stated, "Separate groups were needed because of the lack of support on campus." Participant 4 believed that there was a poor representation of Black faculty and minimal attention to Black males by the PSU's president. He mentioned, "PSU's president tried to please everyone and only showed up at the Black students' initiatives to take photos."

### **Participant 5**

Participant 5 was a very outgoing 21-year-old senior and a first-generation college student who bleeds PSU daily. Participant 5 recalled, "I was very satisfied with PSU's current mentorship system and support of Black males." He credited some PSU faculty for his success during his college experience. Participant 5 explained, "I took advantage of every program PSU offered that fit me." He recalled that "PSU discontinued many programs during the pandemic period and did not bring back many opportunities for students to work with mentors, faculty, or staff in person, only virtually." Participant 5 recalled, "The support system I had at PSU encouraged me to pursue post-graduate studies immediately after graduation." He explained, "I would prefer a Black mentor, but I do not have a preference for the mentor to be male or female."

Participant 5 explained, "If PSU brings back past programs for minority students, more faculty and staff members will participate." He expressed that "bringing back past programs will assist in aligning a community of students to a safe space and an opportunity to create change." Participant 5 argued that "PSU should provide counselors or mentors for students." He explained, "PSU does not have a mentoring program in place, but students are encouraged to use mentoring to their advantage because it will provide an opportunity to develop and grow more competent." Participant 5 recalled that "a low number of Black faculty at PSU would affect Black students." He stated, "Black students must persevere despite not having a mentor because they are still trying

to figure out who they are and what they want to be and pursue future endeavors.” Participant 5 expressed, “I prefer a Black mentor and do not have a gender preference for a mentor.”

### **Participant 6**

Participant 6 was a 22-year-old senior and a community outreach advocate who demanded accountability from PSU. He stated that “the Black students, particularly the Black males, do not receive much support from PSU.” Participant 6 expressed, “The substandard retainment of Black faculty has played a significant role in Black students staying at PSU.” He stated, “Because of the poor support from PSU faculty, some of my schoolmates transferred to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).” Participant 6 explained that “the Black students at PSU would benefit more from a mentoring or support program that is in place for Black students.” He recalled that “non-Black students at PSU receive more support and mentorship than their Black counterparts.” Participant 6 described the support programs at PSU for students of color as “not as impactful post-pandemic.” He stated, “I would prefer a Black male mentor.”

Participant 6 believes Black male mentors are essential. According to Participant 6, “Black male students benefit more from Black male mentoring because of personal and professional growth, and they receive feedback.” He complained that “PSU does a poor job of hiring minorities because many of the professors who were at PSU during my first three years are no longer there.” Participant 6 stated, “Some of my schoolmates have transferred from PSU to HBCUs to receive more support from a Black faculty.” He recalled, “PSU never brought back those pre-pandemic support programs from my first year.”

### **Participant 7**

Participant 7 was a 21-year-old senior and a second-generation college student who lived at home to save money for college. He stated, “My mother’s mentorship continues to play a

significant role in my education journey.” He mentioned, “I prefer a Black female mentor because I believe a female’s mentorship and support would be similar to my mother’s.” He argued that “PSU should do more for Black males since Black male enrollment has increased at PSU, and the university president is a Black male.” Participant 7 aimed to mentor some younger underclassmen once they arrived on campus. He mentioned, “I was disappointed that there is a shortage of Black faculty at PSU.” Participant 7 shared, “I benefitted from Black female mentors.” He mentioned, “My ideal mentor is a Black female because she will remind me of my high school teachers.” He recalled, “My high school teachers continued to check on me even after high school.” Participant 7 shared, “I wanted to mentor younger first- and second-year students to make sure those students get help early.”

Participant 7 believed that “Black students benefit from mentoring.” According to Participant 7, “Since PSU’s Black enrollment has increased and we have a Black college president, the school should be doing more programs such as Black male mentoring and Black student inclusion.” Participant 7 recalled, “I took advantage of mentoring outside of PSU.” He stated, “My mother was my biggest supporter and played a vital role in my pursuit of a college education because she was a college graduate herself.”

### **Participant 8**

Participant 8 was a married 38-year-old senior and a late-bloomer college student who overcame many life obstacles to attend college. Participant 8 explained, “I never saw any support for Black males on campus because I am an older commuter senior student.” In addition, Participant 8 kept up with PSU campus initiatives and programs through email. He explained, “I have never seen any mentoring programs or Black male support initiatives being advertised or mentioned from any PSU media or information sources.” Participant 8 explained, “If PSU

provided it, I would prefer a Black male mentor.” In addition, Participant 8 never noticed a shortage of Black faculty at PSU because he never paid attention to it.

He believed that “PSU provided poor support for Black males.” Participant 8 stated, “I was unaware of what was happening at PSU’s campus because I am a commuter.” He explained, “I was not engaged with student life at PSU.” Participant 8 expressed, “I was a commuter. I paid little to no attention to what was going on PSU’s campus, but I will support any Black outreach initiatives.” Participant 8 stated, “Since I am a commuter and an older senior, I did not need a mentor because of my life experiences.” He explained, “If PSU provided mentors, I would have used them only if the mentor was Black.” He argued, “PSU does not provide many programs for off-campus students, but I believe they should have something in place for students not living in dorms to feel appreciated and thought about.”

### **Participant 9**

Participant 9 was a 23-year-old senior student-athlete, a Greek fraternity member, and lived on campus. Participant 9 explained that “student-athletes receive free tuition, books, room and board, access to mentors, player development staff members, tutors, and an academic center with academic advisors.” He expressed, “The coaches and graduate assistants (GAs) are mentors to the student-athletes.” Participant 9 felt that because the resources were in place and his PSU sports team is predominately Black, the student-athletes received more support than other Black males on campus. He explained, “PSU’s coaching staff’s mentorship was the primary reason for my success on and off the field, and I will graduate in four years.” He stated that “scholarship student-athletes had access to resources that regular students did not have.” According to Participant 9, “My coaches were my mentors.” Participant 9 stated, “I prefer males as mentors.” He expressed,

“I would rather have a male mentor similar to our head coach because coaches go beyond the call of duty to support the student-athletes.”

### **Participant 10**

Participant 10 was a 22-year-old senior, a second-generation college student who volunteered with charities and non-profits. He stated, “Mentoring helps Black males tremendously if they take advantage of it.” In addition, Participant 10 felt that Black male mentors would help him but firmly believes PSU did not want to support a Black male mentoring initiative. He argued, “The university minimizes the need for support for those students.” He stated, “I was very disappointed at PSU and PSU’s first Black president for not providing Black males equally as other communities on campus.” Participant 10 explained that “retaining Black faculty at PSU is disheartening.”

He believed that “PSU’s Black male students need more faculty support to succeed.” He stated that “mentoring programs early in college help students in the long run because they are substantial resources that assure students that they are getting the support they need.” According to Participant 10, “PSU is not trying to hire many minorities to their faculty and staff because there are more White faculty members than minorities.” He mentioned that “the school president is more concerned about likes on social media than supporting Black students because he is very active with social media and promotes his platform.”

### **Summary of Findings**

Table 1 presents a summary of the ten research participants’ experiences and opinions, including Age, Opinion of PSU, Feeling Neglected and Marginalized, Importance of Mentoring, Feelings of Solidarity, Preferred Mentor Race, and Preferred Mentor Gender. The participants were labeled 1 through 10 to protect their identity. In addition, four seniors were 21, and another

four were 22. The other two seniors were 23 and 38, respectively. First, the participants were asked their opinion of PSU, and 7 out of 10 had a negative opinion. Second, the participants were asked if they felt neglected and marginalized, and 7 out of 10 said yes. Moreover, 6 out of 10 participants felt negatively about the feelings of solidarity with other PSU students. All 10 participants felt positive about the importance of mentoring. Nevertheless, the preferred mentor race was Black; nine out of the 10 participants preferred a Black mentor, 7 out of 10 participants preferred a male mentor, 2 of the 10 preferred a female mentor, and 1 participant did not have a preference regarding mentor race or gender. In addition, color coding was used to compare the participants' feelings. In the table, for dissatisfied students, a response highlighted in yellow was used in the Opinion of PSU, and the Feelings of Solidarity columns mean negative; a response highlighted in green means positive for satisfied students. Next, in the Feeling Neglected and Marginalized column, a response highlighted in yellow means yes for satisfied students, and a response highlighted in green means no for dissatisfied students. Moreover, in the Importance of Mentoring column, a response highlighted in purple means positive for satisfied students. A response highlighted in blue for one student means satisfied in some ways or dissatisfied in others.

**Table 1**

Summary of Participants' Experiences and Opinions

Participant	Age	Opinion of PSU	Feeling Neglected and Marginalized	Feelings of Solidarity	Importance of Mentoring	Preferred Mentor Race	Preferred Mentor Gender
1	22	Negative	Yes	Negative	Positive	Black	Male
2	21	Positive	No	Positive	Positive	Black	Female
3	21	Negative	Yes	Negative	Positive	Black	Male
4	22	Negative	Yes	Negative	Positive	Black	Male
5	21	Positive	No	Positive	Positive	Black	Neutral
6	22	Negative	Yes	Negative	Positive	Black	Male
7	21	Negative	Yes	Positive	Positive	Black	Female
8	38	Negative	Yes	Negative	Positive	Black	Male
9	23	Positive	No	Positive	Positive	Neutral	Male



10	22	Negative	Yes	Negative	Positive	Black	Male
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## Discussion

Mentoring within higher education is critical for student engagement, retention, and success (Brewster & Ashley, 2019). Across the findings of the study's ten research participants, five common themes emerged: opinion of PSU, neglect and marginalization, feelings of solidarity, the importance of mentoring, and preferred mentor race and gender.

### Opinion of PSU

Unfortunately, seven of the Black male students interviewed for this study believe there is a lack of an inclusive campus environment for Black males at PSU, and three felt positive about an inclusive campus environment. For example, all 10 participants noted the lack of Black faculty at PSU. The inclusion of Black faculty on campuses assists in the retention and success of Black students because students recognize Black faculty as more accessible and not difficult to connect with (Tuitt, 2012). Moreover, the participants mentioned the lack of support from the university to retain Black faculty and staff. A mentoring relationship with faculty members can help retain Black males (McClain & Perry, 2017). In addition, the majority of the participants in the research preferred a Black male mentor, but not enough Black faculty are retained on the PSU campus. Furthermore, Black male students are more likely to choose mentors of their race when seeking advice or counsel (Goings, 2015). On the other hand, the three students who thought positively about the inclusive campus environment expressed that the administration pledged to increase the number of faculty members of color, continue to learn more about Black students, and form relationships. In addition, those students expressed that students of color were empowered at PSU.

### Neglect and Marginalization

Across a majority of the study's participants, the second common theme was neglect and marginalization. All but one of the study's participants discussed the lack of Black male faculty and staff at PSU and their desire to be mentored by a Black male. According to Participant 1, "Working with Black faculty members would make more of an impact on Black males than non-black faculty members." Because PSU has a high student participation rate, four participants were willing to assist the school in retaining Black male faculty members. However, their services were not needed. In addition, eight participants discussed the dilution of multicultural support at PSU. For example, Participant 4 stated, "I resented that the Black community's needs on campus were always lumped under the title multicultural instead of receiving its attention." Participant 4 explained, "I think PSU pays more attention to the other communities on campus and neglect Black students." Five participants stated that PSU has a Black president but felt he should do more for Black males. According to Participant 7, "PSU should be giving more support to Black males, instead of the university president being more interested in photo opportunities." Therefore, 70% of the participants felt that Black males were neglected and marginalized. Nevertheless, 30% of the participants who felt Black males were not neglected and marginalized indicated that PSU's Multicultural Center provides opportunities for all students of color through Heritage Month programs and Culture Café to learn more about upcoming events offered by Cultures. Moreover, they participated in PSU's Black History Month programs, performed annually throughout February.

Graham (2022) stated that he found four different reasons Black males do not enroll in college, and two of the four resonate with the theme of feelings of discouragement. Regrettably, Black male college students at PSU feel neglected and marginalized. According to Strayhorn (2012), "Without a sense of belonging, there can be no educational success for Black men in

college" (p. 86). The study's findings show that Black male college students feel they have a unique or different college experience from their non-Black counterparts. Experiencing the impact of mentoring relationships could help Black male college students succeed further with graduation, postgraduate studies, and retention.

### **Feelings of Solidarity**

Historically, Black students have reported lower levels of belonging and higher levels of dissatisfaction than their peers (Allen, 1992; Grier-Reed, 2010; Hunter et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2007). In this study, the third common theme was that 60% of the participants shared some of their concerns about a lack of feelings of solidarity. For example, there is a lack of mental health resources and Black counselors, a sense of belonging, and university leadership. Although PSU has a Black president, the majority of the administration and mental health counselors are White. However, some studies have shown that several Black students attending PWIs do not have this feeling (Foxy, 2021). Forty percent of the participants indicated feelings of solidarity at PSU. In addition, PSU has created academic, economic, and social support for Black students. Moreover, PSU has a campus diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) department to support students. Nevertheless, Black male college students can gain a sense of belonging and establish and build mentoring relationships by communicating, asking for assistance early in their college career paths, and being receptive to mentoring opportunities with faculty, counselors, staff, or upperclassmen.

### **Importance of Mentoring**

In contrast to the scarcity of Black male mentors, the fourth common theme across the majority of research participants was the importance of mentoring. Most of the participants agreed that mentoring is important and needed and that PSU should be doing more to support

Black male students with their studies. The participants believed that the presence and support of a mentor of any race or gender was sufficient to increase personal and professional growth.

According to Participant 8, "If I had a mentor early in my teenage years, my career choices might have turned out differently." In addition, Participant 9 recalled that "my college coach's mentoring has helped me become a better student." Participant 2 argued, "Without mentoring or someone assisting me, I would not be in college." Participant 10 argued, "I believe that PSU is not trying to hire many minorities to their faculty and staff to accommodate Black students." Unfortunately, the majority of participants also believed that the low number of Black faculty members at PSU caused most Black males to go without a mentor.

Whether the study's participants viewed PSU positively or negatively, did or did not feel neglected and marginalized, or had positive or negative feelings of solidarity, 10 of the 10 students – 100% - positively viewed the importance of mentoring. In establishing mentoring relationships in higher education, Pope (2002) found that the success of Black students, as well as other minority students, strongly depended on their integration into the academic and social systems of higher education institutions. In addition, mentoring has a rich tradition in our society, and its importance is paralleled in the historical and philosophical foundations of Black students and higher education (Sinanan, 2016).

### **Preferred Mentor Race and Gender**

All ten participants communicated their belief that Black male mentors are needed to ensure the success of Black male students at PSU. Participant 9 expressed a desire to help other Black male students by using the resources that are available to him. For example, if a student were struggling in a particular subject, Participant 9 would connect that student with an academic

advisor from the athletic department to assist. Participant 4 stated, "Having a Black mentor is better because Black mentors can relate to me."

According to Campbell and Campbell (2007), mentorship is any situation in which a more experienced member of an organization maintains a relationship with a less experienced, often new, member and provides information, support, and guidance to enhance the latter's chances of organizational success. Nine out of 10 participants mentioned that having a Black male mentor could have made their challenges and experiences at PSU more relatable. One participant was neutral on a preferred mentor race because he did not care about it as long as he was getting mentored.

Moreover, a college student's connection and involvement within their campus community directly contributes to productive and positive performance and attrition rates (Astin, 1999). However, 7 out of 10 participants preferred male mentors, 2 out of 10 preferred females, and one was neutral on gender. According to Erkut and Mokros (1984), male students try to avoid female mentors. Nevertheless, males prefer high-status, influential male mentors who can push and promote their educational or career goals (Erkut & Mokros, 1984). Therefore, active mentorship and functional communication could lead students to a more favorable opinion of PSU, minimize the feeling of neglect and marginalization, strengthen feelings of solidarity, explain why mentoring is important, and give Black male college students a more decisive choice for a preferred mentor and gender.

### **Research Question**

Students' participation in mentoring programs promotes academic success and persistence and improves retention rates for college students (Sinanan, 2016). This study's research question asked: How can Black male college students establish mentoring relationships

at predominately White institutions? Based on the findings and common themes that emerged, four specific actions can be taken: Think positively, initiate positive contact, take positive action, and take accountability. According to Sinanan (2012), Black males' perceptions of and experiences with social receptivity at a PWI can significantly impact their learning experience.

### **Think Positively**

First, following the examples of Participants 2, 5, and 9, Black male college students must make a personal commitment to think positively. By thinking positively, Black male college students can change the familiar narrative of isolation, discrimination, and fear of working with Black students. Strunk et al. (2018) indicated that Black students made sense of those disparities by conceptualizing racialized treatment as a benevolent preparation for the “real world.” However, establishing positive thinking creates positive emotions and other constructs such as optimism, hope, joy, and well-being (Naseem & Khalid, 2010). McGrath (2004) stated that positive thinking is a generic term referring to an overall attitude reflected in thinking, behavior, feeling, and speaking. In addition, it is essential to create a sense of community to engage and immerse Black men in a feeling that they belong at the institution (Strayhorn, 2012).

### **Initiate Positive Contact**

Black male students can initiate positive contacts on campus. For example, Participant 7 believes that Black students benefit from mentoring and plans to make contact, connect, and mentor younger first- and second-year students. In addition, following the example of Participant 9, students can intentionally engage and interact with the Black male faculty and staff on campus to create more opportunities for an inclusive learning environment for Black students. Some research suggests that positive contact with faculty holds promising results for students, such as increasing a sense of belonging and improved self-worth (Galbraith & James, 2004; Nora &

Crisp, 2008). Following the example of Participant 2, Black male students can also create social groups, student organizations, and physical spaces on campus, such as a Black Student Union, a local NAACP chapter, or profession-specific student organizations such as Black Lawmakers. In one study, creating safe spaces created engagement and drew more Black students because they provided five forms of care: acceptance, understanding, social, academic, and financial resources (Foxy, 2021). Creating a support network, specifically other students, staff, and faculty from a similar group, has proven to be of great value in facilitating a positive quality of experience for Black college students (Sinanan, 2016).

### **Take Positive Action**

Following the example of Participant 9, Black male students can devise a peer mentoring system to support one another and mentor younger students. Some studies suggest that peer mentoring introduced at an earlier age can increase students' feelings of engagement, contributing to their retention in school (Yomtov et al., 2015). Faison (1996) says that “successful mentoring experiences are based on participants sharing common goals, perceptions, and world views” (p. 1).

### **Don't Reject the Opportunity to Be Mentored**

Just as it is essential to identify actions that Black male college students can take to establish mentoring relationships at PWIs, it is also essential to identify actions they should not take. The first action Black male college students should not take is refusing help. Historically, same-race and cross-race mentoring were generally discouraged because many people believed it was ineffective for a mentee to have a mentor of a different racial or ethnic background (Patterson, 2016). However, according to Blackwell (1989), “Mentoring activities can foster a continuing interest in education and may lead to a decision to undertake graduate work” (p. 10).

Therefore, Black male college students should be open to mentors of any race or gender.

Patterson (2016) defines cross-race mentoring as a relationship between a mentor and a mentee of different races. Perhaps even more so than same-race mentoring, cross-race mentoring can be very beneficial for both the mentor and mentee because it can expand the perspectives of both individuals (Rhodes et al., 2002). Regardless of race or gender, an effective mentor will serve as a positive role model and enable their mentee's development of independence, self-confidence, decision-making, and problem-solving skills (Gordon, 2000).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reported and discussed the findings from data collected from semi-structured interviews of 10 anonymous undergraduate senior Black male students at a PWI, PSU, and closed with answers to the study's research question. Chapter 5 will draw conclusions, discuss implications for practice, offer suggestions for future research, and identify the study's limitations.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This study aimed to examine the impact mentoring has on Black male college students pursuing post-graduate education at predominantly White institutions (PWI). Unfortunately, the 10 Black male college students who participated in the study had difficulties connecting with non-Black professors at PSU. In addition, most felt more comfortable working with Black male faculty members than non-Black faculty members. Moreover, most participants felt that PSU was not doing enough to support Black males compared to other communities on campus. Therefore, the findings of the study support my belief that predominantly White institutions (PWIs) should do more to support Black male students. This chapter concludes the study by discussing implications for practice, making recommendations for future research, and documenting the study's limitations.

#### **Research Question and Answer**

The study's research question asked: How can Black male college students establish mentoring relationships at predominately White institutions? Based on the findings and common themes that emerged, Black male college students can establish mentoring relationships at predominantly White institutions by thinking positively, initiating positive contact with others, taking positive action, being accountable, and not rejecting opportunities to be mentored when they arise.

#### **Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study offer several implications for practice. Regardless of actions Black male college students themselves can take to establish mentoring relationships at PWIs,

Black males also need support and encouragement from the university, faculty, and staff to establish mentoring relationships (Chickering & Resser, 1993). Since Black males are the lowest enrolled group at PWIs, Black faculty should mentor at least two Black male students in a school year beginning in the first year of college. Early mentoring can pay dividends for college completion and postgraduate studies (Dixon et al., 2023). Additionally, PWIs should assist Black males in creating mentoring programs and social organizations and seek positive role models. Moreover, formally recognizing Black males on campus can positively affect these students' self-esteem and self-efficacy (Okech & Harrington, 2002).

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Increasing the effectiveness of postgraduate studies by understanding and improving the factors that predict academic success and retention of Black students remains an essential issue in our society (Kincey, 2007). For future research, this study must be replicated at other PWIs and HBCUs to compare data across different institutions. In addition, more interviews must occur with non-Black and Black faculty and staff at other PWIs and HBCUs.

### **Limitations**

The study's primary limitation was the possibility of researcher bias because I am a Black male who was once a college student at a PWi. Therefore, I deeply understand and empathize with my research participant's experiences, which may have clouded the objectivity of the study's data analysis and conclusions. To minimize any researcher bias during the data collection process, I recorded and transcribed each participant's exact words and resisted making assumptions about meaning. Instead, I took their words at face value. I first summarized each participant's exact words to minimize researcher bias during the data analysis. Then, I organized all ten participants' responses into a table, which I used to compare and contrast across

participants. Identifying patterns in the data helped me to see what was there rather than to interpret what I thought was there. Also, in the final report, I intentionally provided literature, citations, discussion, and conclusions that accurately represented the positive and negative data.

Another limitation of this study was that some participants did not fully disclose their honest thoughts. Some participants were not being truthful or not sharing what they were thinking or feeling because they feared repercussions from the university. Several times during the interviews, I had to remind the participants that this study was anonymous and that the researcher was the only person with access to the interviews. Lastly, a limitation was not having a relationship with the institution to identify participants to participate in this action research study. Unfortunately, I could not recruit students on campus face to face, and I had no relationship with any students, faculty, or staff at PSU, which limited me from promptly identifying potential participants. In addition, some of the participants thought the action research study was a joke. Similarly, the Africana Studies director at PSU thought my emails were spam until I could speak to him directly.

### **Conclusion**

There are many challenges that Black males face while pursuing a college degree at PWIs without the help of mentors. Such challenges were substantiated by the 10 senior Black male college students who participated in this study. The opportunity to succeed in college without mentoring is achievable when students think positively, initiate positive contact, take positive action, and do not refuse help when offered. When Black male college students apply themselves by establishing relationships with faculty members, joining social or religious organizations, asking for assistance and support from the university, and participating in peer mentoring, there is no limit to what they can achieve.

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